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DIVORCE AMENDMENTS

2024 GENERAL SESSION

STATE OF UTAH

Chief Sponsor: Jordan D. Teuscher

Senate Sponsor: _____

LONG TITLE

General Description:

This bill modifies provisions related to alimony determinations.

Highlighted Provisions:

This bill:

- ▶ adds factors to be considered when determining the standard of living that existed during a marriage;
- ▶ requires a specific look-back period for information provided to demonstrate the financial conditions and needs of a spouse seeking to be awarded alimony;
- ▶ places restrictions on when a court can reduce a showing of need related to alimony;
- ▶ provides alternative means for demonstrating income and the standard of living during a marriage; and
- ▶ modifies provisions related to when a court may elect to equalize income between parties by means of an alimony award.

Money Appropriated in this Bill:

None

Other Special Clauses:

None

Utah Code Sections Affected:

AMENDS:

30-3-5, as last amended by Laws of Utah 2023, Chapters 327, 418



28

29 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*

30 Section 1. Section **30-3-5** is amended to read:

31 **30-3-5. Disposition of property -- Maintenance and health care of parties and**
32 **children -- Division of debts -- Court to have continuing jurisdiction -- Custody and**
33 **parent-time -- Alimony -- Nonmeritorious petition for modification.**

34 (1) As used in this section:

35 (a) "Cohabit" means to live together, or to reside together on a regular basis, in the
36 same residence and in a relationship of a romantic or sexual nature.

37 (b) "Fault" means any of the following wrongful conduct during the marriage that
38 substantially contributed to the breakup of the marriage:

39 (i) engaging in sexual relations with an individual other than the party's spouse;

40 (ii) knowingly and intentionally causing or attempting to cause physical harm to the
41 other party or a child;

42 (iii) knowingly and intentionally causing the other party or a child to reasonably fear
43 life-threatening harm; or

44 (iv) substantially undermining the financial stability of the other party or the child.

45 (c) "Length of the marriage" means, for purposes of alimony, the number of years from
46 the day on which the parties are legally married to the day on which the petition for divorce is
47 filed with the court.

48 (2) When a decree of divorce is rendered, the court may include in the decree of
49 divorce equitable orders relating to the children, property, debts or obligations, and parties.

50 (3) The court shall include the following in every decree of divorce:

51 (a) an order assigning responsibility for the payment of reasonable and necessary
52 medical and dental expenses of a dependent child, including responsibility for health insurance
53 out-of-pocket expenses such as co-payments, co-insurance, and deductibles;

54 (b) (i) if coverage is or becomes available at a reasonable cost, an order requiring the
55 purchase and maintenance of appropriate health, hospital, and dental care insurance for a
56 dependent child; and

57 (ii) a designation of which health, hospital, or dental insurance plan is primary and
58 which health, hospital, or dental insurance plan is secondary in accordance with Section

59 30-3-5.4 that will take effect if at any time a dependent child is covered by both parents' health,
60 hospital, or dental insurance plans;

61 (c) in accordance with Section 15-4-6.5:

62 (i) an order specifying which party is responsible for the payment of joint debts,
63 obligations, or liabilities of the parties contracted or incurred during marriage;

64 (ii) an order requiring the parties to notify respective creditors or obligees, regarding
65 the court's division of debts, obligations, or liabilities and regarding the parties' separate,
66 current addresses; and

67 (iii) provisions for the enforcement of these orders;

68 (d) provisions for income withholding in accordance with Title 26B, Chapter 9,
69 Recovery Services and Administration of Child Support; and

70 (e) if either party owns a life insurance policy or an annuity contract, an
71 acknowledgment by the court that the owner:

72 (i) has reviewed and updated, where appropriate, the list of beneficiaries;

73 (ii) has affirmed that those listed as beneficiaries are in fact the intended beneficiaries
74 after the divorce becomes final; and

75 (iii) understands that if no changes are made to the policy or contract, the beneficiaries
76 currently listed will receive any funds paid by the insurance company under the terms of the
77 policy or contract.

78 (4) (a) The court may include, in an order determining child support, an order assigning
79 financial responsibility for all or a portion of child care expenses incurred on behalf of a
80 dependent child, necessitated by the employment or training of the custodial parent.

81 (b) If the court determines that the circumstances are appropriate and that the
82 dependent child would be adequately cared for, the court may include an order allowing the
83 noncustodial parent to provide child care for the dependent child, necessitated by the
84 employment or training of the custodial parent.

85 (5) The court has continuing jurisdiction to make subsequent changes or new orders for
86 the custody of a child and the child's support, maintenance, health, and dental care, and for
87 distribution of the property and obligations for debts as is reasonable and necessary.

88 (6) Child support, custody, visitation, and other matters related to a child born to the
89 parents after entry of the decree of divorce may be added to the decree by modification.

90 (7) (a) In determining parent-time rights of parents and visitation rights of grandparents
91 and other members of the immediate family, the court shall consider the best interest of the
92 child.

93 (b) Upon a specific finding by the court of the need for peace officer enforcement, the
94 court may include in an order establishing a parent-time or visitation schedule a provision,
95 among other things, authorizing any peace officer to enforce a court-ordered parent-time or
96 visitation schedule entered under this chapter.

97 (8) If a petition for modification of child custody or parent-time provisions of a court
98 order is made and denied, the court shall order the petitioner to pay the reasonable attorney fees
99 expended by the prevailing party in that action, if the court determines that the petition was
100 without merit and not asserted or defended against in good faith.

101 (9) If a motion or petition alleges noncompliance with a parent-time order by a parent,
102 or a visitation order by a grandparent or other member of the immediate family where a
103 visitation or parent-time right has been previously granted by the court, the court:

104 (a) may award to the prevailing party:

105 (i) actual attorney fees incurred;

106 (ii) the costs incurred by the prevailing party because of the other party's failure to
107 provide or exercise court-ordered visitation or parent-time, which may include:

108 (A) court costs;

109 (B) child care expenses;

110 (C) transportation expenses actually incurred;

111 (D) lost wages, if ascertainable; or

112 (E) counseling for a child or parent if ordered or approved by the court; or

113 (iii) any other appropriate equitable remedy; and

114 (b) shall award reasonable make-up parent-time to the prevailing party, unless make-up
115 parent-time is not in the best interest of the child.

116 (10) (a) The court shall consider at least the following factors in determining alimony:

117 (i) the standard of living existing during the marriage, which factors shall include the
118 following:

119 (A) income received throughout the marriage;

120 (B) the approximate value of all real and personal property received throughout the

121 marriage, or owned or used during the marriage;

122 (C) all other benefits received during the marriage; and

123 (D) any other factor that the court determines to be appropriate to enable the court to
124 make an accurate and complete determination of the standard of living existing throughout the
125 marriage;

126 (ii) the financial condition and needs of the recipient spouse, including a showing of all
127 income for the three-year period immediately preceding the filing of the divorce petition and
128 through the date of trial, provided that:

129 (A) need may only be reduced by the court if the showing of need exceeds the standard
130 of living shown to be present during the marriage; and

131 (B) the recipient spouse may show need by showing the income or standard of living
132 present during the marriage rather than by itemizing post petition expenses;

133 ~~[(ii)]~~ (iii) the recipient's earning capacity or ability to produce income, including the
134 impact of diminished workplace experience resulting from primarily caring for a child of the
135 payor spouse;

136 ~~[(iii)]~~ (iv) the ability of the payor spouse to provide support, including showing all
137 income for the three-year period immediately preceding the filing of the divorce petition and
138 through the date of trial, and showing all property owned;

139 ~~[(iv)]~~ (v) the length of the marriage;

140 ~~[(v)]~~ (vi) whether the recipient spouse has custody of a minor child requiring support;

141 ~~[(vi)]~~ (vii) whether the recipient spouse worked in a business owned or operated by the
142 payor spouse; and

143 ~~[(vii)]~~ (viii) whether the recipient spouse directly contributed to any increase in the
144 payor spouse's skill by paying for education received by the payor spouse or enabling the payor
145 spouse to attend school during the marriage.

146 (b) The court may consider the fault of the parties in determining whether to award
147 alimony and the terms of the alimony.

148 (c) The court may, when fault is at issue, close the proceedings and seal the court
149 records.

150 (d) As a general rule, the court should look to the standard of living, existing at the
151 time of separation, in determining alimony in accordance with Subsection (10)(a). However,

152 the court shall consider all relevant facts and equitable principles and may, in the court's
153 discretion, base alimony on the standard of living that existed at the time of trial. In marriages
154 of short duration, when no child has been conceived or born during the marriage, the court may
155 consider the standard of living that existed at the time of the marriage.

156 (e) (i) The court may~~[, under appropriate circumstances,]~~ attempt to equalize the
157 parties' respective standards of living even if the payor spouse has the ability to meet the needs
158 of the recipient spouse or if the amount of alimony award would exceed the needs of the
159 recipient spouse.

160 (ii) In attempting to equalize the parties' respective standards of living, the court may
161 equalize the incomes of the parties as well as divide property or order the sale of property.

162 (iii) If the recipient spouse has not been found to be at fault, and the recipient spouse
163 has diminished workplace experience resulting from primarily caring for a child of the payor
164 spouse, it shall be the rebuttable presumption that the court shall equalize the parties' respective
165 standard of living by equalizing the parties' incomes for a term equaling at least the number of
166 years and months that the marriage existed.

167 (f) When a marriage of long duration dissolves on the threshold of a major change in
168 the income of one of the spouses due to the collective efforts of both, that change shall be
169 considered in dividing the marital property and in determining the amount of alimony. If one
170 spouse's earning capacity has been greatly enhanced through the efforts of both spouses during
171 the marriage, the court may make a compensating adjustment in dividing the marital property
172 and awarding alimony.

173 (g) In determining alimony when a marriage of short duration dissolves, and no child
174 has been conceived or born during the marriage, the court may consider restoring each party to
175 the condition which existed at the time of the marriage.

176 (11) (a) The court has continuing jurisdiction to make substantive changes and new
177 orders regarding alimony based on a substantial material change in circumstances not expressly
178 stated in the divorce decree or in the findings that the court entered at the time of the divorce
179 decree.

180 (b) A party's retirement is a substantial material change in circumstances that is subject
181 to a petition to modify alimony, unless the divorce decree, or the findings that the court entered
182 at the time of the divorce decree, expressly states otherwise.

183 (c) The court may not modify alimony or issue a new order for alimony to address
184 needs of the recipient that did not exist at the time the decree was entered, unless the court
185 finds extenuating circumstances that justify that action.

186 (d) (i) In determining alimony, the income of any subsequent spouse of the payor may
187 not be considered, except as provided in Subsection (10) or this Subsection (11).

188 (ii) The court may consider the subsequent spouse's financial ability to share living
189 expenses.

190 (iii) The court may consider the income of a subsequent spouse if the court finds that
191 the payor's improper conduct justifies that consideration.

192 (e) (i) Except as provided in Subsection (11)(e)(iii), the court may not order alimony
193 for a period of time longer than the length of the marriage.

194 (ii) If a party is ordered to pay temporary alimony during the pendency of the divorce
195 action, the period of time that the party pays temporary alimony shall be counted towards the
196 period of time for which the party is ordered to pay alimony.

197 (iii) At any time before the termination of alimony, the court may find extenuating
198 circumstances or good cause that justify the payment of alimony for a longer period of time
199 than the length of the marriage.

200 (12) (a) Except as provided in Subsection (12)(b), unless a decree of divorce
201 specifically provides otherwise, any order of the court that a party pay alimony to a former
202 spouse automatically terminates upon the remarriage or death of that former spouse.

203 (b) If the remarriage of the former spouse is annulled and found to be void ab initio,
204 payment of alimony shall resume if the party paying alimony is made a party to the action of
205 annulment and the payor party's rights are determined.

206 (13) If a party establishes that a current spouse cohabits with another individual during
207 the pendency of the divorce action, the court:

208 (a) may not order the party to pay temporary alimony to the current spouse; and

209 (b) shall terminate any order that the party pay temporary alimony to the current
210 spouse.

211 (14) (a) Subject to Subsection (14)(b), the court shall terminate an order that a party
212 pay alimony to a former spouse if the party establishes that, after the order for alimony is
213 issued, the former spouse cohabits with another individual even if the former spouse is not

214 cohabiting with the individual when the party paying alimony files the motion to terminate
215 alimony.

216 (b) A party paying alimony to a former spouse may not seek termination of alimony
217 under Subsection (14)(a), later than one year from the day on which the party knew or should
218 have known that the former spouse has cohabited with another individual.

219 Section 2. **Effective date.**

220 This bill takes effect on May 1, 2024.